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The nationwide need for maintenance of skills programs for students who discontinue their language studies 1-3 years before college is explained. Figures based on a national questionnaire identify the extent of this need, and possible program objectives and structure are suggested. Major attention is directed to such student activities as audiovisual productions, correspondence with students in the target culture, language clubs, newspapers and student publications, directed reading and writing, guided free expression, self-study topics, and summer camps and programs. A selective bibliography is provided. (AF)

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Number 1

Maintaining Foreign Language Skills for the Advanced-Course Dropout

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The Problem of Advanced-Course Dropouts

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In a book which appeared in 1959 Dr. James Conant stated that the *minimal* high school program should permit at least the upper 20% of the academically talented students to study one foreign language for no less than four years.¹ Yet, despite the support of prominent public figures and the infusion of tens of millions of Federal dollars into local foreign language programs, the percent of students continuing on into the 4th-level courses has remained well below the 10% level to say nothing of the 20% figure suggested by Dr. Conant. The last nationwide report on the percent of students electing 4th-year courses revealed the following: Spanish 4.5%, French 7.9%, German 6.9% and Latin 3.4%.² The same report indicated large increases in enrollments at the junior high and early senior high school level. Taken together the two sets of figures mean that we have encouraged large numbers of students to begin their study of a foreign language at the elementary or junior high school level; yet more than 90% have discontinued that study by the end of the third year. As a result, many college-bound students will have a lapse of one, two, or even three years between the time that they complete their study of a foreign language in high school and the point where they have an opportunity to resume that study at a college or university. This has created a situation where students with seemingly respectable high school transcripts have, in reality, had a long period of time in which their language skills have lain dormant. Upon entering college

they have often done poorly in the advanced courses to which they are typically assigned, or else out of fear of failure, they have elected a different language from the one studied in high school. Through this process some of the best students—those who were motivated to start a language at an early age—have been lost to the profession. It is not possible to document the magnitude of lost human foreign language resources which this situation has caused; one can only suspect that it is enormous.

During the early years of our foreign language renaissance in the United States, a number of educational leaders attempted to alert the profession to the dangers of premature discontinuance of language study. Dr. Conant himself showed an awareness of the danger in 1960 when he stated: "If the study of a language is started in grade 7, the school board must be ready to finance continuing instruction in grades 8-12 in the same language."³ Similarly, in 1963 the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages included among their resolutions the following state-

¹ James B. Conant, *The American High School Today* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 78.

² Caroline Teague and Hans Rütimann, *Foreign Language Offerings and Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools, Fall 1965*. (New York: Modern Language Association, 1967), pp. 14, 23, 32, 58. Note: Average 4th-year continuation for all languages falls well below 7% when all first-year pupils in 1962 are compared with all 4th-year pupils in 1965.

³ James B. Conant, *Recommendations for Education in the Junior High School Years* (Princeton, N. J.: Educational Testing Service, 1960), p. 18.

ment: "[It is recommended] that foreign language study be offered as an uninterrupted sequence; in other words, that foreign language in elementary school, in junior high school, and in senior high school should *not* be thought of as *separate* programs, but as one *continuous* program, from wherever it is introduced in the curriculum through grade 12."⁴

Some schools have attempted to meet the problem of high attrition in the advanced courses by manipulating the credit system in such a way that a student is required to stay with his chosen language through grade 12. With one such approach, for example, three credits are awarded for the completion of the language course work offered in grades 7-10. From that point on the student is awarded 3/5 of a credit for a course which meets three times a week in the 11th grade and 2/5 of a credit for one meeting twice a week in the 12th grade. Thus, the 4th-level course is completed over a period of two years and the termination of foreign language study in grade 11 is avoided. However, such innovations have been rare. For the most part, very little has been done to solve the growing problem of the premature dropout. Large numbers of students are still signing up for foreign language at the junior or early senior high school level and are breaking contact with the language at grades 10 or 11.

One of the most recent attempts at a solution to this problem has been the creation of the so-called "Maintenance-of-Skills" program (hereafter referred to as the MOS program). Such a program might be defined as including "all activities which are designed to maintain or improve the student's language skills during those years in the senior high school program when regular foreign language courses are no longer available." The purpose of this paper is to help establish guidelines for the MOS program, and to identify the kinds of activities which can be used successfully with such programs.

Present Status of MOS Programs

In an effort to determine the extent of existing MOS programs in the United States the author sent a questionnaire to foreign language supervisory personnel in all 50 states. While a complete report of survey responses is

not within the scope of this paper, a few selected figures appear to be relevant. A full 46 of the 50 states responded within the deadline period. Of these, 39 indicated that large numbers of students were, indeed, terminating their study of a foreign language at grade 10 or 11. Also, 39 state foreign language supervisors were of the opinion that there is a great need for some kind of MOS program, although there was by no means general agreement on how such programs should be structured. Seminars meeting a few times weekly either for no credit or for partial credit were reported in 11 states. Self-study projects of various kinds were reported in 12 states. Pen pals and tape pals were reported in seven states each. Other activities listed were language clubs, summer programs, foreign travel, auditing of advanced classes, language laboratory attendance, working as teacher aides to help lower-level students, and outside reading. In all, 17 states reported the existence of MOS programs, 24 respondents reported that no such programs existed to their knowledge, while 11 states either did not respond or simply indicated that no information was available.

Objectives of the MOS Program

As presently structured, MOS programs include one or more of the following objectives: (1) improvement in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (emphasis may be remedial or developmental, according to the needs of the individual student), (2) development of the ability to use the language more creatively than was possible in the early levels of language study (emphasis is upon the process of *divergent* rather than *convergent* thinking; i.e., the student is required to draw upon his repertoire of words, sounds, and structures to express what he wants to say rather than having additional knowledge imposed upon him from without), (3) pursuit of individual interests *through* the foreign language (activities may include work with belletristic topics, but are not limited to them; the student may branch

⁴ This is the first of 12 recommendations presented 29 Dec. 1963 at the annual meeting of the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages; subsequently published in the *Modern Language Journal*, XLIX (Feb. 1965), 93-94.

into such areas as science, history, art, music, sports, architecture, or any other area which is of interest to him), (4) development of personal initiative in learning how to study foreign languages (acquiring techniques for independent study can be a valuable asset to the college-bound student who, in some cases, has been "spoon-fed" throughout his pre-college training period). Perhaps a fifth objective of the program could be identified under the term "motivational feedback." In some cases the activities of the MOS group are so dramatic that they provide an incentive for students in the earlier levels to persevere through the more tedious aspects of the beginning courses in order to become eligible for the MOS program. (The establishment of an MOS program presumes that students have gained at least minimal control of basic phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary.) Ideally the MOS program allows the student to put into use most of the basic language material acquired earlier. As a motivational device it is roughly analogous to the music educator's use of concerts and recitals which induce students to practice more diligently in anticipation of the public performance. One might also draw a comparison with the science exposition which allows the student to display publicly a concrete application of the scientific process. Similarly, some foreign language teachers with a sensitivity to the need for good public relations have learned how to capitalize upon such things as dramatizations and audio-visual productions to demonstrate language proficiency to prospective students, administrative personnel, and parent groups.⁵

Structure of the MOS Program

Of necessity, the MOS program will be highly flexible. The degree of flexibility will be determined by availability of appropriate staff, equipment, and materials. A highly structured format would tend to defeat the basic objectives of the program. On the other hand, definite administrative procedures *are* needed if students are to take the program seriously. Above all, MOS programs must avoid a "fun-and-games" atmosphere. The students must understand from the outset that the program, although informal, is completely serious in

nature. Actual accrediting of the MOS work may range from a full unit of credit to nothing more than a notation of completion on the transcript. A school may offer both options with different minimal expectancies for each. However, whether the program is given for credit or not, evaluative procedures must be sufficiently tight to assure that each student engages in intellectually honest projects. Perhaps the most common approach is the "contract system," in which the student agrees in advance to complete a specific series of activities by the end of the semester. These activities are then summarized on a special contract form which is signed by the student, the foreign language teacher, and, in some cases, the high school principal.

Student Activities in the MOS Program

Diversity is the key word for student activities in an MOS program. Ideally, such a program will allow both cooperative committee work (for those students who need the support of fellow pupils) while at the same time permitting the creative "loner" to pursue a completely individualized project. The types of possible activities are limited only by the imagination of the teacher, the availability of specialized equipment and materials, and by the unique abilities and interests of the individual students who have enrolled in the MOS program. The MOS program should also take into account the rather obvious fact that not everyone is highly creative and capable of self-study. Thus, the MOS program will offer the student a wide choice of possible basic activities, some of which are highly specific in nature and others which are only generally suggestive. Representative samples of possible MOS activities appear below. It should be noted, however, that these items represent no more than a slim cross-section of the ultimate potential. They are drawn from reports by city and state foreign language supervisors in various parts of the country regarding the kinds of activities which have been carried on successfully by students who have completed two or

⁵ Percy Fearing, "Using Creative Activities to Reduce the Dropout Rate," from an unpublished paper delivered at Wisconsin State Univ., Whitewater, 30 March 1968.

more levels of a given foreign language. The scope of this paper does not allow anything approaching a definitive itemization of possible activities.

A. Audio-visual Productions

These are usually done by committees of students working partly on school time and partly on their own time. The nature of the production will vary in accordance with the sophistication of available equipment and materials. In most cases audio-visual productions involve the following steps: (a) producing the visuals, (b) writing the script, (c) making the tape recording (including narration, sound effects, background music, and "beep" or "click" signal to indicate change of visual), and (d) presenting the production to an audience. Examples of this type of activity are given below.

1. Slide series with tape. Students obtain 2 X 2 color slides of their school and local community showing typical teenage activities, local points of interest, and basic commercial, industrial, educational, and governmental features of the community. A script is then written to explain each slide. After being corrected and approved by the teacher (or by a native aide), the script is recorded on tape. Each student must make a tape which serves as a basis for evaluating pronunciation. The best tape is sent (with the slides) to a "sister" community in the target culture where students in the same age range have produced a comparable audio-visual "tour" with foreign language narration. Similarly, skits can be produced by providing taped narrations for a planned sequence of color slides. If the production is presented to non-language students and to parent groups, a second projector can be used to project subtitles on an adjacent screen. (A similar technique can be used with 8mm motion-picture film.)

2. Overhead projectuals. Students can prepare cartoon-type presentations with tape or live narration. (Again the sequence of script writing, editing, and oral recording can be employed.)

3. Videotape recording. Lower equipment costs have put the videotape recorder within the range of possibility for many school

systems. With the help of an adult technician student groups can now present television plays and skits for subsequent showing to language clubs, other classes, and parent groups. Students can use existing scripts or can write their own. One technique requires advanced students to take simple stories from the 2nd-year book and convert them to a dramatic format. In addition to developing skill in writing and speaking, this technique helps to make students more keenly aware of differences that exist between two basic literary genres. Students work in committees the size of which is determined by the number of characters needed to complete the cast. Students provide their own costumes, props, sound effects, etc.

4. Short wave radio. Students produce a variety of simulated radio programs on tape partly with their own material and partly with items dubbed from shortwave broadcasts. (Some evening work by students is necessary here to get optimum reception and most desirable programing.)

5. Use of Existing Visuals

- a. The student supplies his own narration for a filmstrip pertaining to the foreign culture or to any other topic which interests him. Narration can be live or taped.

- b. Art reprints of famous paintings from the target culture can serve as the basis for an original student narration. This can be presented live to other MOS students who then take notes and direct questions to the presenter. (Color slides can also be used.)

- c. Films, 8mm or 16mm, dealing with the target culture can serve as the basis for student production of a foreign language narration. An English sound track can be run on "silent" as the synchronized student tape provides the film narration. Short films or film segments are best for this purpose. Excessively elaborate native-voice sound tracks can also be replaced by simplified student tapes. (Note: films requiring voice synchronization should not be dealt with in this

manner. Only films which are adaptable for commentary should be used.)

- d. Commercially produced flannel-board (or magnetic board) figures can be presented in a progressive sequence which is predetermined by one of the MOS students. The MOS group must extemporaneously create a story on the basis of the visual stimuli. Referring to the visuals, each member of the group tells his version orally. The presenter for the week is the discussion leader. A group discussion follows the final presentation. (Other types of visuals can also be used for this purpose.) Success of the session is judged by how well students are able to express themselves in the unanticipated situation created by the visuals.

B. Correspondence with Students in the Target Culture

Pen and/or tape pals. The student engages in a year-long exchange of tapes or letters (or both) with students of the same age group. If the foreign student is trying to learn English, then half of each letter is done in English and half in the target language. Each correspondent agrees to correct mistakes in the other's letter and to enclose corrections in the next mailing. (The student retains a carbon copy for making the corrections.) In the case of tapes, one side can be in English, the other in the target language. Tapes recorded on standard two tracks at 3 3/4 i.p.s. are most convenient for mailing and are generally compatible with machines around the world. Students in both countries learn current idioms, cultural facts, etc. The content of the letters and tapes will vary according to taste. Letters may include press clippings, chess moves, discussions of family life, favorite pastimes, etc. Tapes can include excerpts of favorite music, radio commercials, local sound effects, and the usual teenage topics of conversation. Students will usually write a script before recording tapes to minimize errors and to avoid wasting tape with long pauses. Thus, the tape exchange touches some

aspects of all four skills: writing script, reading script, speaking into microphone, and listening to one's own voice and to the voice of the native speaker on the return tape. Students often become extremely conscientious in seeking the right word or expression and in enunciating properly. The desire "to sound right" to a fellow teenager in Europe or South America is often a more powerful motivating force than is the alleged need to make a good impression on the adult instructor in the local school.

C. Clubs

In some high schools a scheduled block of time is designated as the club or activity period. In such cases MOS students can—by virtue of their superior language proficiency—perform an active role in the foreign language club. The club itself can serve as a vehicle for displaying the results of the MOS activities to students in the earlier levels. MOS students can present skits, show slides and movies, play tapes and records, and encourage others to use the target language during the club period. The club period can also be used to prepare a foreign language newspaper.

D. Newspaper and Other Student Publications

Foreign language newspapers can be produced either in conjunction with club activities or as an assigned activity for interested MOS students. Of necessity such foreign language publications will usually be dittoed or mimeographed. This does not seem to lessen student enthusiasm for the content. Other possibilities are the inclusion of a foreign language section in regular school publications. French, German, and Spanish poems have appeared in the school literary magazine, for example.⁶ Poems, jokes, anecdotes, crossword puzzles, local school news items, and amusing essays are samples of the content of foreign language publications.

E. Directed Reading in a Chosen Area

The student selects items from an extensive library according to individual tastes and

⁶ *The Pennant*, 1966, LaFollette High School, Madison, Wisconsin, included such a foreign language section. Information provided by Gerald Payne, Foreign Language Coordinator, Madison Public Schools.

aspirations. The library should include novels, short stories, poetry, plays, etc. It might also contain periodicals of many types as well as encyclopedias, scientific readers, biographies of famous authors, poets, scientists, artists, musicians, historical figures, etc. An evaluative format is established to measure the student's comprehension of the topic.

F. Directed Writing

The student submits a written report on some specific aspect of a particular academic discipline for which resource materials are available in the foreign language materials center.

G. Guided Free Expression

Each of the MOS students must serve as discussion leader for an advanced conversation session. His specific duties: (a) he must formulate a series of questions on a topic of current interest (e.g., the war in Vietnam, gun control law, eighteen-year voting age, open housing, the generation gap, the evils of report cards, the national election, etc.); (b) he must supply unfamiliar vocabulary items (checked in advance by the teacher) which fellow students can refer to during the discussion; (c) finally, he must attempt to elicit strong expressions of opinion (always in the foreign language) to which other students are likely to react (e.g., "Who thinks we should pull out of Vietnam? Why?" Or, "Who thinks we should send more troops? Why?"). Vocabulary for such topics is often lacking in the belletristically-oriented curriculum. Therefore, from the standpoint of building usable conversational vocabulary, this type of activity seems justifiable. People from other cultures tend to want an expression of opinion from Americans on precisely such issues. By contrast there are remarkably few conversations which are initiated through references to medieval epics, gothic architecture, or Proto-Indo-European syllabic nasals.

H. Self-Study Topics

The student determines the specifics for each item, confers with the teacher, and, after agreeing upon a reasonable work load, he signs a contract which outlines content and completion date.

I. Summer Camps and Summer Programs

A number of respondents to the MOS survey indicated a preference for summer activities. Summer programs range from regular course offerings to rather elaborate attempts to create a simulated target-culture environment within the school campus area and community⁷ or in a lakeside woodland camp. The simulated-environment program will often include many of the MOS activities described above. Properly staffed, it can also have some of the advantages of a foreign study program without the cost disadvantages. (For example, the target language becomes the vehicle for communication, dollars are exchanged for foreign currency, buildings, paths, and playing fields are given foreign language names, etc.)

Conclusion

Enrollment figures from 50 states and responses from 46 state educational agencies indicate a great need for programs which are designed to help upper-level senior high school students maintain and improve skills acquired at the earlier instructional levels. It would appear that the pressure from required courses (i.e., science, math, English, and social studies) tends to reduce advanced-course enrollments in foreign languages to the point where they are considered financially indefensible by the local school administration.⁸ Thus, in thousands of schools across the country, small groups of students in one or more languages find themselves unable to complete the sequence of study which they began in elementary or junior high school. In at least 17 states schools have tried to cope with this problem by establishing programs which do not require the full-time attention of a certified foreign language instructor. The basic problem with such programs involves the need to throw the student upon his own resources while at the same time retaining the integrity of the discipline. It is hoped that this paper will be helpful in identifying ways to resolve that problem.

⁷ Roland Durette, "Language Institute for Students," *Modern Language Journal*, XLIX (Feb. 1965), 106-107.

⁸ The definition of minimum acceptable class size may range from as low as four pupils to as high as 15.

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Selective List of Materials (SLOM); available for \$1.50 from MLA Materials Center. Supplements to the 1962 *SLOM* are also available at \$1.00 each for three volumes (French and Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, German and Russian); order from Materials Center, Modern Language Association, 62 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. 10011.

Source Materials for Teachers of Foreign Languages, Single \$1.00 (Stock No. 381-11824). Discounts on quantity orders: 2-9 copies, 10%; 10 or more copies, 20%. Available from Publications-Sales Section, National Education Association, 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Also available as item B-41 from the MLA Materials Center, 62 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. 10011.

2. Audio-visual

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Arendt, Jermaine D., ed. "The Overhead Projector in Foreign Language Teaching." *Audiovisual Instruction* XII (May 1968), 463-467. This article provides a concise yet remarkably complete set of guidelines for the use of the overhead projector for foreign language instruction. It includes instruction on how to prepare transparencies along with specific examples in French, German, and Spanish.

Kuebler, George, Curator, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., 20565, can supply beautiful color slides of original paintings, and, in some cases, brief recorded narrations are available in English and the foreign language.

Richardson, G. "The Uses of Visual Aids in the Teaching of Modern Languages." *Advances in the Teaching of Modern Languages*, Vol. 1. (Edited by B. Libbish.) New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964.

3. Correspondence: Letter, Tape, and Slide

As a general rule it is best if arrangements for pen and tape pals are made through direct contacts between an American school and a school in the

foreign country. However, this is not always feasible. Thus, the following list may prove helpful to those who have no such contacts. However, the list is drawn from highly limited contacts with students and teachers who have used the sources with some success. Undoubtedly there are many other sources which have not been brought to the attention of the author.

Letters Abroad, 209 East 56th St., New York, N. Y. 10022. (Affiliated with Fédération Internationale des Organisations des Correspondances et d'Echanges Scholaires.)

Office of Private Cooperation, U. S. Information Agency, 1776 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington D. C. 20025.

World Pen Pals, Univ. of Minnesota, 2001 Riverside Ave., Minneapolis 55404.

World Tapes for Education, Box 15703, Dallas, Texas 75215. (Membership includes a newsletter and an up-dated list of members around the world.)

4. Special Sources of Information and Materials by Language

French. *FACSEA*: Society for French American Cultural Services and Educational Aid, 972 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. 10021.

German. *TAP Guide*. National Carl Schurz Association, Inc., 339 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19106.

Latin. American Classical League, Miami Univ., Oxford, Ohio 45056.

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